

MIRACLE DISCS FOR THE BLIND

F. Fraser Bond

1945

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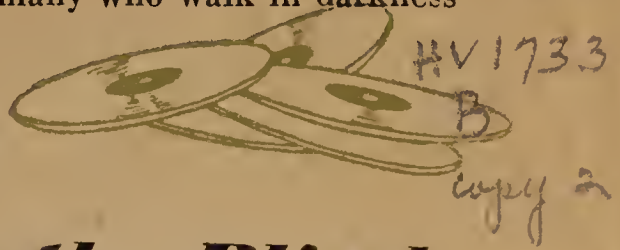


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AMERICAN PRINTING  
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**



Talking books have packed a full measure of joy for many who walk in darkness

# Miracle Discs



**for the Blind**

by FRASER BOND

**T**HE POSTMAN rang the bell. This time he did not have to ring twice. The door opened and into a pair of outstretched arms he placed a stout black carton which bore in white paint the legend:

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FREE

SOUND REPRODUCTION  
RECORDS FOR THE BLIND

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The carton contained the latest Talking Book recorded on phonographic discs. The outstretched arms belonged to any one of the thousands of blind men and women who daily welcome Uncle Sam's emissary bringing them reading matter in sound from the nearest public library that operates a Talking Book department.

This year the Talking Book celebrates its eleventh birthday. In that short span it has earned the title of "The greatest boon which science has brought to blind people in this generation." The Talking Book story really begins on that evening in 1877 when Thomas A. Edison performed his initial experiment in recorded sound. Into the primitive cone of his first phonograph he recited the nursery jingle about Mary and her little lamb.

He watched the needle scrawl its

pattern on a wax cylinder; then, with his contrivance adjusted, heard the wavering, squeaking record of Mary's adventures.

Edison realized what his invention would one day mean to the blind and wrote an article about it in the *North American Review*. But that day was a long way off. Probably most people mistakenly thought that all blind people read Braille or other systems of embossed type with their fingers.

Actually, it takes a blind man to understand what other blind men need. Louis Braille was blind when, in 1826, he invented the system of raised dots which opened books to the sightless. Like Braille, the man behind the Talking Book is also blind. He is Dr. Robert B. Irwin, executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind in New York City. Dr. Irwin knew that for many, blindness comes late in life when they find it difficult to learn finger reading. He knew, too, that many industrial and traffic accidents damage hands as well as eyes. The research workers of the American Foundation for the Blind bore out these facts. They found that less than twenty per cent of approximately 200,000 blind men and women in the United States could read with their fingers. Dr. Irwin then resolved that these thousands should get books, in the one medium that



patient understanding, made no effort to dissuade her but circled slowly as if waiting until her fury was spent.

Finally she turned from her vengeance and swam to him. For a long minute they lay quietly. Then swimming side by side they followed the others.

The sun had set, and the quiet bay was purple with the reflection of fading twilight, when a power

boat whose skipper had caught our signals finally towed us into port.

"Didja get a good catch?" he asked the member of our crew who tossed him the tow rope. Our man replied in disgust that the trip had been a complete bust. I had the sense to keep quiet, realizing my commercial-minded boat-mates could hardly share my joy in the most rewarding day I had ever spent on the Gulf.

### ***Freak Squeaks***



**I**T STARTED away up in a Chicago office building where Joe Arcano took his morning exercise by swinging himself back and forth from a door frame. While he was blithely developing his muscles, his generous-sized brogans suddenly whipped off his feet and flew through the window, thudding in a shower of broken glass on the street below where a Miss Eleanor Harris was walking along.

She promptly fainted.

"Woman's been killed!" howled a passer-by. "Hit by a man who jumped out a window!" Up roared a police car accompanied by an ambulance for the unconscious Miss Harris. But where was the body of the suicide? While the crowd wondered, the athletic Mr. Arcano sauntered up and demanded his shoes.



**A**S PROOF that man should never have monkeyed around with the horseless carriage, there's the saga of the Midwestern couple whose car crashed into a guard fence. The collision sheared off two fence posts and drove a twelve-foot fence rail through the radiator and instrument board. As the rail passed be-

tween the two passengers, it snagged the lady's clothing, stripped it from her and neatly tucked it away in the trunk compartment behind.



**B**OWLING ALONG a highway in Ballyclare, Ireland, two men got the shock of their lives when their car soared into the air like a bird. Leaning out the windows they discovered that the cable from a fugitive barrage balloon had wrapped itself around the car and was rapidly hoisting it heavenwards. They jumped out only a moment before the car landed in a tree top.



**D**OWN IN the cyclone belt, where odd mishaps blow in a mile a minute, an Oklahoma cyclone whipped up one day while Mrs. W. H. Ryder was washing dishes. "Let it come," she said belligerently to her sister. "I hope it blows the kitchen away so we won't have to wash dishes!" Obliging the cyclone whisked away the kitchen with Mrs. Ryder and the unwashed dishes in it. The strange journey ended with Mrs. Ryder perfectly intact, and her wish fulfilled.

—GRACE POSTON



would reach all of them—sound.

The doctor lost no time in interesting people who could help. A philanthropic New Yorker gave generous assistance. The Carnegie Corporation placed a grant at his disposal. Dr. Irwin engaged sound engineers for research and experimentation to find the best type of record for the books in sound. They found it in a long-playing disc, so thin that twenty can travel in a single carton; so durable that if a blind man knocks one off a table, it will not break. They devised, too, an electric reading machine, resembling a portable phonograph, which a blind person can operate by touch alone. The Talking Book was born.

AT FIRST THE Foundation and its friends bore the entire cost of recording and circulating the Talking Books and of manufacturing the reading machine to play them. In 1931, Congress had passed an act authorizing an appropriation of 100,000 dollars annually to the Library of Congress for books for the adult blind, these books in Braille and other embossed types to be deposited in libraries serving large sections of the country—sections which often include several states. After the successful development of the Talking Book, Congress increased the appropriation to include this new medium. Today this annual appropriation reaches 500,000 dollars, 400,000 of which is allotted to the publication of Talking Books and the upkeep of reading machines. The other 100,000 dollars goes for books in raised characters. As soon as the American Foundation for the Blind records

them at its sound studios in New York City, the Library of Congress places them in twenty-seven regional libraries which operate departments for the blind, and the records travel to and from library and reader postage free.

During the eleven years of its existence the Talking Book has grown up. Its development showed that a book written in sound can do much more for its readers than one merely published in inkprint. It can, for instance, introduce the author's own voice; it can enliven its chapters with incidental music and sound effects; it can bring plays fresh from Broadway, acted with complete casts of prominent players; it can even sing. Each fresh book, when it arrives, brings with it fresh excitement and surprises.

Trained readers from the stage and from radio do most of the recording. The Foundation picks them for both the pleasing qualities of their voices and their ability to maintain the required reading pace. Each side of each record runs for fifteen minutes, and to read clearly, fluently and swiftly for fifteen minutes without a cough or a fumble takes practice. However, the Talking Book studios frequently invite such famous authors as Thomas Mann, Somerset Maugham, Archibald MacLeish and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt to initiate the sound recordings of their own books. For the most part, these writers read the first side of the first record and after that the book is continued by a regular reader.

This author participation has proved popular with blind listeners. They feel they get from hearing the author's voice an inkling of his

personality. They note the emphasis he puts on certain words and phrases. The late Alexander Woollcott, a staunch friend of blind people, was particularly successful in getting the personal note into his records, for he conveyed the impression that he was reading directly to the individual listening.

The introduction of music in the Talking Book came early in its career. One of the Foundation's first recordings was Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. It began with the strains of the traditional carol, *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*. Music is used, too, in biographies of noted musicians. Here the sightless reader has a distinct advantage. In an inkprint *Life of Mozart*, for instance, the musical illustrations are set down merely as printed scores and notations. In the Talking Book version, the piano or orchestra gives them their full beauty as illustrations in sound. A striking use of music by these Talking Book discs to enhance the emotional effect comes in the recording of the Vachel Lindsay poem *General Booth Enters Heaven* where a Salvation Army Headquarters band uses all its eloquence to point both the meaning

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*Fraser Bond, who teaches journalism at New York University, writes from the heart about the Talking Book, for his own eyesight was blacked out for several years by cataract. His hunger for books was poorly satisfied by students who read aloud; the quicker their intelligence, the worse they garbled the words. Young actors "at liberty" did a better job; and the Talking Book was best of all. Since regaining his sight, Fraser Bond is like a man reborn: the colors and patterns in commonplace things which few people but artists often notice afford him fresh and eternal pleasure.*

and the rhythm of the poet's lines.

When it comes to hearing plays acted by Broadway casts, Talking Book readers again have the edge on their sighted neighbors. In the hinterland where troupers no longer troupe, the theatre comes to the sightless through the mail. Their favorite armchairs become seats on the aisle as they listen to such hits as *Our Town* and *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. The players they hear are such top-notchers as Eva Le Gallienne, Mady Christians, Whitford Kane and Brenda Forbes.

Talking Books of plays include incidental music and sound effects and lack only the costumes and the scenery. Even this lack is compensated for by short spoken interludes which set the stage architecturally, give materials of construction, and dress the players in terms of fabric, quality and period. These interludes also indicate actions to which the spoken lines give no clue, but which the listener must know about in order to follow the plot.

PERHAPS THE most unusual Talking Books yet recorded are the volumes which tell about the nation's wild song birds and which, in addition, let these songsters chirp and warble for themselves in order that blind people can come to recognize each bird by its song. Here the American Foundation for the Blind had the cooperation of the ornithological department of Cornell University. Equipped with sound truck and cargo of recording equipment, the Cornell professors tracked the birds from Florida to the Rocky Mountains and focused their parabolic microphones on the songsters with a gunsight. In some



cases, they set up small microphones near the actual nests and a cable carried the birds' songs to the recording sound truck hundreds of yards away.

The average Talking Book runs to some fifteen to eighteen double-sided discs and each side of each twelve-inch record plays for fifteen or sixteen minutes. This means that the average book's reading time is approximately nine hours. The longest Talking Book yet recorded, Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, runs to 119 double-sided records. For this one, the Talking Book reader has to count on a 59½ hour week to finish it. Another talking tome is Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, which takes eighty records.

When the postman arrived with

the first Talking Book carton eleven years ago, blind readers had the choice of enjoying either Shakespeare's *As You Like It* or *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. Today they can select their reading matter from a thousand different titles, and the American Foundation for the Blind and the American Printing House for the Blind increase that number by well over 100 new ones each year. Blind people can ask their library to send them a Talking Book 'Western,' a mystery thriller, or, if they wish, a scholarly treatise on astronomy. But whatever title they select, the happiest miracle of these discs for the blind still lies in the fact that the Talking Book service which lightens their darkness comes to them free.

## Keep Your Sunny Side Up



**Y**OU KNOW at least one pleasant person. His face and manner are easy to remember.

Whenever you meet him, no matter how disagreeable the circumstances, he's always smiling, always ready with a cheerful greeting.

Sometimes you've tried to catch him off guard, wearing a sour expression revealing that he, too, is weak and mean like other men. But even in a crisis he has not changed—and of one thing you're sure: you know a really pleasant person.

Such a man is one of society's greatest assets. His daily life makes those remote ideals—neighborliness, friendship, service and tolerance—a visible reality. And it's all in his tone, his smile, his never-changing pleasantness. You use this person when you yourself need

cheering. You appreciate the warmth of his company and the fact that no matter when you approach him, you'll be sure of his instant friendliness.

You know at least one pleasant person. Are *you* a pleasant person, too? Do you have mean streaks which make everyone around you angry and bitter? Are you pleasant merely on occasion, or do you sincerely try to be pleasant all the time?

The next time you feel irritable and ready to "take it out" on everyone you meet, remember your pleasant friend, the man whose good nature never lets anyone down. Hold his image in your mind. Reconstruct his smile, his gracious manner, in a mental photograph, and it will be hard to remain cross with such a pleasant memory shining in your face. —JAMES T. MANGAN



These aptitude tests eliminate trial and error by finding the right man for the job

## ***How to Rate a***

by CAROLINE BIRD MENUEZ

**D**O YOU OBJECT when a person steps in front of you in a line of people? If so, you're very likely an aggressive person. This quality is an asset in some jobs, a handicap in others.

Does it make you uncomfortable to be "different" or unconventional? If it does, you may not be very adaptable to new situations. A company would be making a mistake to transfer you from a quiet suburban territory to a tenement district in New York City.

As he answered questions like these, stockroom clerk Anderson squirmed in his chair in the personnel office of the Glowfoam Soap Company and wondered whether the boss had lost his mind. But when the analysts were through tabulating and cross-checking, they knew more about Anderson's job possibilities than if they had known Anderson all their lives. Soon after, the district manager called Anderson in and asked him how he would like to be a salesman.

"I've never sold so much as a thimble in my life!" he gasped, "and furthermore, I don't think I could."

"We *know* you can," the boss replied.

And the boss was right. A year later, Anderson collected a bonus check equal to his entire year's salary in the stockroom as the



## ***alesman***

company's reward for his share in promoting a new toothpaste.

The man who spotted Anderson's sales ability had never laid eyes on him before. In fact, he hadn't moved from his desk in the New York office of the Klein Institute. By simply comparing Anderson's test results with those of successful Glowfoam salesmen, Jack Klein could predict within a twenty per cent margin of error that Anderson would be a success at selling.

Experienced sales managers consider themselves lucky if they garner one good salesman for every three they hire by personal interview. They know that it costs 4,000 dollars in salary, drawing account and training to give a 3,000-dollar a year man a fair trial. That's why Babcock and Wilson, Bauer and Black, the Carstairs division of Calvert Distillers, Hercules Powder, Johnson and Johnson, and McKesson and Robbins—among other firms—have found it cheaper to take the Klein Institute's recommendations on applicants than the hunches of their own executives. In planning post-war business, many of these big concerns are now combing their offices and factories for hidden sales talent already on the payroll. Salvaging a man like Anderson kills two birds with one stone. It builds employee morale, and produces a salesman



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